

THE
FUTURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

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THE FUTURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

A SERMON

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ISAIAH, ii. 1, 5.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it: And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.

To the botanist even a hedge-row is full of interest. To a geologist a barren crag is eloquent. To a zoologist any, even the lowliest, forms of life are suggestive. And to a Bible-loving man all nature is full of sacred associations. The sun above him may recall the "sun of righteousness;" the trees, the saints of God, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord;" the stars suggest the future of diligent Christian laborers who shall shine for ever; and the hills "rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun" may well remind him of the kingdom of his Master "the mountain of the Lord's house," to which is promised establishment "upon the top of the mountains."

From its vast size and solid character a mountain may well stand for any great institution. It represents what is enduring, lofty, and fixed. Such a representation is warranted by the nature of things. "David perceived" says the sacred writer, "that the Lord had *exalted* his kingdom." He might therefore properly enough say, "Thou didst make my *mountain* to stand strong." (Psalms xxx. 7.) The "mountains shaking with the

swelling of the sea " of Psalm xlv. 3 are explained in verse 6, after the fashion of Hebrew poetry, to be "kingdoms moved." Hence Babylon becomes in Jeremiah li. 25 : "a destroying mountain." These Old Testament writers find the symbols of which the New Testament writers make use ; and hence the frequent use of mountains in this sense in the book of Revelation. There are many such "mountains" in the world—old institutions, kingdoms, churches, idolatries, that have grown with time and apparently acquired permanent stability. There is one that boasts a divine origin—for the Church is not a mere voluntary society—and with which the Lord's honor is especially connected. Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream a little stone, cut out without hands, gradually expand into a great mountain and fill the whole earth. (Dan. ii. 45.) That mountain is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, set up on the broken fragments of the four great empires and established in the time of the last of them. The Lord's temple was built upon Mount Zion—which came to be called "the holy mountain." It stands therefore with great propriety for Christ's kingdom, and to represent the elevation of Christ's kingdom above all human institutions no language could be more apt or expressive than this, "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains."

A mountain is in itself an outstanding and prominent object—a landmark in the world which easily arrests the eye and attracts attention ; and by far the most prominent institution in the world is Christ's kingdom. It has done more to attract notice, give character to men, and make history, than any other agency in the world.

A mountain catches the clouds, arrests the vapors, and draws them down in rain upon the earth. They fall and form the springs in the hillsides—where great rivers take their rise and whence they set out in their beneficent race ; and so the Church of God attracts to itself divine influences which flow forth from it and bless the nations. Enlightenment, liberty, civilization, are among the indirect blessings the world enjoys through the kingdom of Christ.

Mountains resting on the earth, and piercing the sky with their peaks, whose heads are lost amid the clouds, seem to bind heaven and earth together ; and so the Church of God is the link of connection between the earth and heaven. God keeps up the world because his Church is in it. His people on earth by their praises, prayers, and services bind the earth to heaven. Mountains greatly affect the climate of any country, sheltering, or chilling, as the case may be ; and the moral atmosphere of any land may be determined from the extent to which the Church of Christ is in it.

Now it is said that this institution, described as a mountain, shall not merely rise, but rise on the top of all other mountains, that is, rival mountains—towering over them all—higher than the highest of them. The nations shall be like broad streams of flowing water making their way thereto—"all nations shall flow unto it." The figure is mixed and bold, but suggestive. Rivers, according to nature's course, flow down from the hills. But this process is something above and beyond nature. This is by Divine and sovereign grace. No kingdom on natural and common principles ever was founded as Christ's was—in the crucifixion of its sovereign. The whole history of its progress is one of superiority to natural and common laws. That Galilean fishermen should move the world, and that their cause should triumph over Grecian philosophy and religion, and over Roman arms, is not a thing that could have been foreseen or predicted. As unlikely as that rivers should flow to the tops of the hills, so unlikely was it that they should ever have gained a place of commanding influence.

And the same thing is true of the turning of the soul to the Lord. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." As likely as the voluntary ascending of a stone, or the climbing of a hill by a river, is the turning of the heart to the Lord by any act of its own. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

And so when we are calculating how long it will require (at the present rate of progress) for the world to be evangelized, we are losing our time. We have no data on which to proceed.

The thing *shall* be done, for the Lord has said it, and in such ways as human foresight could never have anticipated or provided. How long it will require for the French to complete their Suez Canal is a fair subject for calculation. The time may be indicated with probable accuracy when at a given rate of progress Mount Ceniz will be tunneled through. These works are being done by human forces, the power of which we can fairly estimate. How long it will require for a man to dig down and carry away a given hill may be easily calculated. How long it requires an earthquake to do it is not for human calculation. How long it will take to do any work of mere human effort is easily reckoned, but with God what seems the work of a thousand years can be compressed into a day, and what is possible in a day can be spread over a thousand years.

I would fain have you clear and satisfied in your judgment as to the correctness of the interpretation now given. There are but two ways in which the words can be understood, namely, literal or symbolical. Suppose we take them literally. Then the prophet assures us that the inconsiderable eminence crowned by the temple is to shoot up and over-top Alps and Himalayas! and this new and astounding freak of physical geography will touch the consciences of men and attract them to the place for worship! This literal interpretation Edward Irving was "far from slighting," for most respectable persons held it, but he did not venture so far, rather thinking with the best Jewish Rabbis that the elevation is moral, and refers to the honor and high esteem in which men will hold the divine service. There is no escape from the anomalies and incongruities in which such a literalism would land us, but in the interpretation that makes this and all such delineations symbolical. And so we can see with what propriety the prophet Ezekiel (xvii. 22, 23,) represents the lowly Jesus as "a tender twig" ("the rod of the stem of Jesse," of Isaiah xi. 1.) planted "upon an high mountain and eminent on the mountain of the height of Israel," and becoming a goodly cedar under which shall dwell "all fowl of every wing, in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." For if any rule of prophetic interpretation

is well established and sure, it is, that predictions delivered in one dispensation, and falling to be fulfilled in another, are to be interpreted according to the genius and distinctive character of the dispensation within which their fulfilment comes. The "incense and pure offering" of Malachi (i. 7.) to be rendered to the Lord by the Gentiles from east to west, are not surely the rites in which Ritualism copies Rome, but the sacrifices of praise and service of the New Testament Church (Heb. xiii. 15, 16.) "with which God is well pleased."

(2.) When shall this establishment take place? At the time when Isaiah issued this prediction the kingdom was limited to the Holy Land. The future history of the Church was divided by the Jewish prophets into two periods, one before the Messiah's coming, and one after. They never anticipated any extension of the Church beyond the boundaries of Judea until the Messiah's coming. But all the period after that they call "the last days." They do not use this phrase in a particular but in a general sense. They do not mean by it the closing years of the world's history—the last century or the last few centuries. All the time subsequent to Christ's coming is "the last days." (Heb. i. 2.) Eighteen centuries of the last days have run their round. We have seen the patriarchal dispensation, then the Jewish, then the Christian, and if there be any other, prophecy is silent on the point. "Little children," said John, (1 John ii. 18.) "it is the last time," 1800 years ago. There shall never be another form of God's rule than that now introduced. The little stone does not become silver or gold, or undergo any change of texture or substance; growth in size is the only alteration of which it is the subject. Our lot is in the last days. How far they may run it is impossible for us to say. "The times and the seasons God hath reserved in his own power;" but sometime during this closing dispensation the kingdom of the Saviour shall have prominence and power above all the kingdoms and institutions of earth, in fact "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord." And, if men would but consider, is there not something very awakening in this view of things? "It is the last time." Sinners out of

Christ! there can be no greater facilities than we have now for being saved. No better opportunities are to come. No more light is to be furnished. No easier terms are to be propounded to you. God the Father dealt with our race in the day when He created us. But men sinned. God the Son came in fulfilment of gracious promise. "The world knew him not." He was crucified and slain. He ascended to his Father and sent down the Holy Spirit. He now pleads with men, bears witness to Christ, and deals with us for the carrying out of the provisions of the covenant. This is the last form of Divine approach. There is no fourth person of the Godhead to deal with our race. If we blaspheme and reject this Divine Spirit who bears witness to Christ, the one only High Priest, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin," and there awaits men no new form of offered deliverance.

(3.) And what is the mode of enlargement? It never occurred to the Jews of our Lord's time, that a church could grow up independent of and outside Palestine and their own tribes. "Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" said they, half in wonder, half in scorn, (John vii. 35), when He told them that they should seek him and not find Him. But He did intimate in many ways his kindly intentions towards the Gentiles. The Roman Centurion's faith he appreciated and commended. So did he with the Syrophœnician woman. The Jews believed the Gentile nations to be seventy in number, from finding seventy heads of families and founders of nations mentioned in Gen. x. In relation apparently to this supposed number of Gentile nations, Christ took seventy of his disciples and sent them out to preach; as He had twelve chosen in relation to the tribes of Israel. If ever the thought entered a Jewish mind regarding the spread of Christ's kingdom he looked for accessions to the Jewish nation. But the Lord, while giving the Jews the first offer, was far from restricting the Gospel to them. "Go ye into all the world;" Out of Zion went the law. "Beginning at Jerusalem," was the order: "to the end of the earth" was the limit. Where Christ suffered death—where his name was cast out as evil—

where his enemies if they could prove anything against Him might best do it, there, in the honored metropolis of Judea and Judaism is the Christian Church first set up, and the mother church of the nations planted. Such honor did God put on Jerusalem. "Out of it went the law, and from it the word of the Lord." Hence the apostle Paul speaks of the Church (Eph. i. 20,) as being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the Chief Corner Stone; and in the delineation of the new Jerusalem in Rev. xxi., the names of the twelve apostles are inscribed on the foundations of the city.

The apostles had no successors. They died one by one, but not until they had communicated the divine fire to whole communities. Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Rome,—all have heard the Gospel. In all it has found believers. And now the nations evangelize one another. It is not merely Jews bringing Gentiles into the Church. What Jerusalem and Zion were to the Hebrew, his Church has now become to the Christian. He calls it his Zion; we do so still. Go to England and Wales, and you shall see "Zions," and "Bethels," and "Bethesdas," and "Jerusalems," written over the doors of Christian churches where is offered worship as truly of the New Testament type as anywhere on the face of the earth. The nations shall say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." They teach one another. The blessed impulse communicates itself, and nations that used to challenge each other to bloodshed, or to stimulate each other to crime, now call to each other, by men, by books, to come and worship the Lord. And see how true and scriptural is the message they bear to each other! "Come . . . he will teach us of his ways." They are wise enough to expect just the teaching He undertakes to give—not philosophy or history, or political economy, not science of any kind, but "of his ways"—of truth, love, righteousness, of peace, of purity, of holiness. This the Lord teaches, and they learn for a practical purpose,

“and we will walk in his paths.” This purpose gives interest to all hearing. If you met Dr. Livingstone and heard him describe the route through the portion of Africa he has traversed it would deepen your interest greatly if you were at once to set out to traverse it yourself. You would say, “I have to take this route myself; let me know it thoroughly.” You profess to value practical preaching. You do not probably always know what it is; but here I commend to your imitation this practical plan, “He will teach and we will walk.”

Large portions of the race over whom Christ judges—whom He controls—whose opinions He forms, whose conduct He shapes, have been wonderfully preserved. How different it is where Christ judges not! The Indian lays him down to sleep with his spear, like Saul's in the camp, stuck beside his head—ready to his hand if a foe should attack him in his sleep. In many Eastern lands an armed man accompanies the farmer as he sows his seed, to prevent its being violently taken away; and not only does mutual strife prevail, it is strife of the most atrocious and remorseless kind. Who forgets, that has read them, the spirited words of old Lord Chatham, when denouncing the proposed employment of the Indians in the British service in this land, when he described “the massacres of the Indian scalping knife—and the cannibal savage torturing, murdering, devouring, drinking the blood of his mangled victim?” Where Christianity has gone it has dried up the stream of human gore, in many instances preserving tribes from sheer extermination.

I am aware you may point to singular and apparently decisive examples against this. You may bid me look to the recent bloodshed in this land. You may point me to the Thirty Years' War of the Continent and other struggles between professedly Christian nations. You may point me to atrocious outrages such as French arms seem to have perpetrated on the poor defenceless Polynesians; but it is not Christianity, but the want of it, that does this. It has been said, indeed, that the bloodiest wars have been religious wars; but who would allege that Christ's kingdom caused them? Violent resistance to it has

sometimes produced them, and in this sense Christ came to send a sword on the earth. But in so far as his rule is owned and his scepter obeyed, peace prevails, as beautifully described by the words "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks;" and this rule will yet become universal, and a parliament of nations will adjust differences as truly and justly as law-courts now settle our minor internal disputes. We do not dream of this, or hope for it, but *believe* in it, and expect it. It is as certain as the resurrection from the dead, as certain as the general judgment. There is no evidence for one that does not hold good for the other, and the belief of this is to influence us now. The prophet in view of all this cannot but call to Israel and Judah "come ye in and let us walk in the light of the Lord," (v. 5.) Since he will do this, since his sway will be so general, and so gracious, since even Gentiles shall come to value and love it, do ye, O House of Jacob, come and walk in the light of the Lord; let us be devout, pure, close-walking, and holy. Precisely so ought the view of the future to influence us, to stimulate us to personal holiness and to Christian activity.

This event is certain. It is no great matter practically to me whether it be ten years, or a hundred, or ten thousand hence. The result is certain, and I should like to have some share in bringing it about. When Englishmen first set foot on India, who could have predicted that in a century from the battle of Plassy, the peninsula should be theirs? Small successive bands of men fought, and ruled, and administered, and died, but the subjugating process went forward; so bands of Christian laborers toil and die, but the results accumulate towards the great consummation.

Then O sinner, what stand do you mean to take towards the Head of this kingdom? Do you mean to resist Him? Oh! why should you when He comes to you as Prince of peace and invites you to peace? Yield yourself up to God through Christ. His love to you is attested by his cross. *It* saves you; not your feeble, imperfect love to Him. Oh, come and believe Him, and the salvation of his people shall be yours. Earthly

powers have often tried to bring men under control with violence and blood ; Christ wishes you to be His, and it is by blood also ; but O sinner ! it is by His own—the blood of the Captain of your salvation, shed for your ransom and deliverance !

And you who have received Him and come into his kingdom, seek to walk in the spirit of it. Be loving, gentle, charitable and peaceful. I know how many strifes, divisions, and heartburnings can be pointed to, all under color of religion ; but you know it is not religion but the want of it that produces these ; or when motives are sincere and character pure, the want of that “sound mind” which the spirit of God is able and willing to give. Oh ! try to “walk in the light of the Lord” so that in your measure and place you may promote the interests of that kingdom which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Let me in urging this general obligation, say something of your privilege in connection with the Board of Foreign Missions of our church. I have had opportunity through the kindness of the Secretary to look at the proof-sheets of the forthcoming Report, and I notice with much gratitude to God, that while all the ground occupied anywhere is held, in some quarters new stations have been opened, not so much from new facilities at home, as from the natural growth of the work under the Divine blessing ; and now a difficulty has to be faced by the Board. The children of the church raised a considerable sum, and carried the Board over the immediate obligations of the year, but the high rate of exchange continues, and there is a necessary and inevitable debt which will make it necessary to contract operations abroad if there be not some enlargement of gifts at home. There will be lacking, say thirty thousand dollars—the cost of a house here—and for the lack of that the Presbyterian Church will have to direct the Board to recall some missionaries, close up some schools, and explain to the people that the Christians of the United States can buy and pay for enormous territories for themselves, but cannot afford to give

them any more Gospel teaching, and win wider territories for Christ! Is this to be done? Who would like to make this explanation? Where will the Board begin this work of disgraceful retrenchment? With the missions to the Indians in the Omaha region? Why, all the world has joined in lauding the enterprise that has sent the locomotive to break the silence of these far-off plains. Shall we have to complain that the Railway Companies can get funds enough for their undertaking, but that Christians are doubtful if money is well invested in christianizing Indians?

No, we must go elsewhere; shall it be to India then? But there never was so favorable a condition of affairs in India as there is now. The mutiny of ten years ago which, at first it was thought, would put an end to all missionary work there, has given it a new impulse. If it stopped conversions abroad, for the minds of men were naturally excited, it effected many a happy change at home. Rhapsodical sceptics had talked of the mild and gentle Hindoo, and discouraged evangelistic efforts. They changed their minds as they read the real character of Hindooism in the slaughter of sons, brothers, and sisters at Cawnpore and Delhi.

Then shall we contract operations in China, that dead sea of human souls, at which we used to look in hopeless despair, wondering who was to send the Gospel ship through the sluggish waters? But God interposed rebellion, and internal strife broke up the masses, destroyed monopolies of power, called attention to the foreigners and their ways, and now when China and Japan are, in open defiance of all their time-honored traditions, holding out their hands to Christendom, is Christendom to be indifferent? These children of the older semi-civilizations ask us—whom the Gospel has made strong and powerful—for bread; shall we give them a stone? They make treaties with us now. Shall we tell them nothing of the covenant of grace? God has been giving to English and American missionaries more real success there than in almost any other field. Shall we hold back? No: let us pray and believe—and let us move in the direction of our prayers— that

the silver and the gold shall be given for the maintainance of these noblest enterprises to which we can put our hands. Christians! let us remember that Christ still sits over against the treasury; and let us remember that our perishable money put into his hand in the right spirit, becomes transmuted into treasure in heaven and fashioned into incorruptible crowns.

